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ABSTRACT

A survey of the participants explored the competing interests involved at a national debate tournament, including: (1) how the desire to maximize competitive prowess trades off against socialization among students; (2) how increasing the number of elimination rounds for reasons of judge equalization adds another round to an already crowded schedule; (3) the advantages and disadvantages of multiple judge panels; (4) questions of "lexis/nexis" access at the tournament site; and (5) how a large event on a relatively rigorous time table can be adjusted to make it more competitor friendly. Student input was obtained through a survey and interviews. Responses were broken down into categories of scheduling, resources, judging, awards and ceremony, and social opportunities. Results indicated that all Cross Examination Debate Association (CEDA) national tournament (CNT) attendees complained about the schedule, with too little time allowed for moving to rounds and receiving coaching; students who had competed at both the CNT and the NDT tournaments universally mentioned the participation awards as enhancing their enjoyment of the tournaments; and the lack of access to food as a problem. Findings also suggested that students want experienced critics and perceived the CNT as having poor quality judging. Suggestions for improvements include scheduling changes, resource increases, and a post-tournament celebration. (Includes eight notes; appended are two proposals for changes.) (CR)

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Depth of Commitment: The Challenge of Modern Debate
Cross Examination Debate Association

HUMANIZING THE CEDA NATIONAL TOURNAMENT

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the competing interests involved at a national debate tournament, including how the desire to maximize competitive prowess trades-off against socialization among students; how increasing the number of elimination rounds for reasons of judge equalization adds another round to an already crowded schedule; the advantages and disadvantages of multiple judge panels; questions of lexis/nexis access at the tournament site; and a general examination of whether a large event on a relatively rigorous time table can be adjusted to make it more competitor friendly.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to spark an interest in designing changes and providing additional resources that will enhance the Cross Examination Debate Association national tournament (CNT) experience for all students. It was born out of ten years experience and a general belief that change begins outside rather than inside the quasi-governmental CEDA organization. This is not an attempt to grind any axes, and anyone who comes into contact with this paper is invited to share their honest comments and experiences with me. This document is offered as a beginning, not an end.

It is also offered to point out that making the CNT a positive experience is a shared responsibility. Shared by the CEDA organization and program directors.

Incremental changes over the next five years are recommended. By targeting a 5-year plan of implementation, there is room for the CEDA and NDT communities to decide whether to continue a parallel universe, attempt a more homogenized melding, or separate.[1]

DEFINING THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

After reviewing the responses, and interviewing other individuals[2] who had

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[1] I hope we move closer together rather than further apart. I have found the primary differences to be in process rather than ultimate goals. Most individuals (students and coaches alike) have expressed openness, and questions are being asked to help increase understanding. There are still examples of "superiority complexes" among both groups, but I am convinced that all of us are stronger for the purposes of supporting student interests if we continue to explore for common ground.

[2] I believe the number of individuals who attend national tournaments sponsored by different organizations during their college career will grow if organizations continue to share topics, but currently there are a small number of individuals who have had the opportunity to compete at

competed at both the CNT and NDT, for purposes of this paper, the "student experience"[3] is most easily broken down into the categories of scheduling, resources, judging, awards and ceremony and social opportunities. Respondents included individuals who had competed only at the CNT, only at the NDT, and those who had competed at both.

SCHEDULING

Lack of time is the number one enemy of debate. Too little money is universal enemy number two. Both are at the root of the balancing act required to schedule and run a quality national debate tournament. However, if the organizational goal is, as it should be, to provide a memorable once-a-year national debate tournament experience for those who attend, the time and money issues should be set aside in favor of achieving that goal.[4]

None of the existing national tournaments have identical schedules, qualifying procedures, or elimination round schemes. In addition, the official high school national tournaments operate outside the regular school year. In spite of the many differences, however, all have the same end-points:

- to crown a national champion(s);
- to celebrate student participation in the debate activity by the student's participation in the national competition;
- to reflect a positive image of academic debate.

Although this paper doesn't cite any official statement of the objective of the CNT, it seems reasonable to assume the above are consistent with the motivation for establishing the CNT in 1986. All of those goals would be enhanced by providing a better, more user-friendly schedule at the CEDA national tournament.

All of the CNT attendees complained about the schedule and that there was too little time allowed for moving to rounds and receiving coaching. The

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more than one "type" of national tournament. I made an attempt to identify some of those individuals and interview them in depth.

[3] Because this is an on-going effort, this definition might change as more individuals respond to Exhibit 1 and other surveys. However, any deviations from the articulated definition are clearly noted herein.

[4] Go big or go home, has always been one of my mottoes to live by. Another is that money should never stand in the way of something important. I'm happy to report that because I have believed the truth of those two statements and have acted positively, the lack of a resource has always allowed me the opportunity to improve the UMKC program rather than be halted by it. Debate is a valuable activity. I absolutely believe that if a director uses their administrative skills (and is patiently persistent) they can create a program that denies no reasonable need because of a lack of money. Directors MUST be realistic, though and understand that money is not dumped in bags out side the squad room door just because debate is a wonderful thing. You must expect to spend time generating support within your institution.

new proposed schedules allow an hour between the release of pairings and the beginning of the round. That adds a total of 31/2 hours to the current CNT format over the two days of preliminary rounds, and about the same amount to the elimination schedule. Those who don't want to be involved in coaching or preparing for rounds could use the time for socializing. Either way, it is not wasted time, according to the past participants who answered the questionnaire.

Although strictly speaking, scheduling changes would not guarantee the "best" national champion will be selected each year, the schedule has a fundamental impact on the health, nutrition, mental alertness, and attitude of competitors and critics. Diminution of any of those elements necessarily means the performances of all involved and even outcome results are not maximized. Also, there are no guarantees that an expanded schedule for more meals, rest and recreation will result in better nutrition et al, because individuals will still have to make choices to utilize those opportunities. However, the only apparent risks of an expanded schedule are time and expense. Additionally, nothing else could make a more positive qualitative improvement for ALL students, regardless of their level of success.

The proposed change in Exhibit 3A would only lengthen the competition schedule by a few hours, but would realistically increase the total time and expense commitment to the tournament by one full day/night. Figured on a per team basis, the cost factors increased would be housing, meals, vehicle rental (if any), and a probable increase in entry fees to cover the extra time and rooms used by tournament staff. Figuring an entry of 225 teams, the scheduling changes would result in $150-$170 per team increase at 1996-97 prices,[5] a very manageable increase if a director knows about it in September when the travel schedule budget is worked out.

The primary time concern is students and educators missing class. There is no way to completely avoid the problem unless nationals coincides with an institutional holiday. There are however opportunities to minimize them. All of the answers require advance planning by program directors - everything from notification of students' professors and arranging alternative staffing for classroom obligations to potentially eliminating other tournaments from the travel schedule so students will not miss an inappropriate amount of school. Directors deal with those situations throughout the entire competitive season. The question becomes how much priority does attending the national tournament have? To make the national tournament the best experience possible, CEDA should assume nationals is the number one priority of every team attending and offer a schedule that makes the experience something of value to all competitors.

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[5] The costs are based on an additional 1 1/2 room nights ($105); $20 additional entry fee; and the remainder in increased vehicle rental and food costs per team. These figures include the expenses for a two-person team and one coach.

RESOURCES

First the ultimate wish list -

- On-line hook ups (see Exhibit 4) at the tournament site[6]
- Participation mementos given to all students
- Food served to all students during the competition on site
- Tournament-provided photo copy machines at hotels and tournament site

Unbelievably, the question of "legitimacy" of on-line data bases and electronic research still exists in CEDA while the world is moving increasingly toward accessing and transmitting information electronically. It would be tragic and arguably unethical for the CEDA organization to institutionally forbid the use of lexis/nexis, et al.

The concept of competitive programmatic equity is one that academic debate has been struggling with for as long as I can remember. Much of the reward system developed by the Cross Examination Debate Association has been specifically designed to allow everyone to be compared and rewarded for success on equal grounds. However, as educators and competitors we must at some point acknowledge that competition in itself makes complete equity impossible. As long as we endorse competition - give wins and losses - there will be rewards for those who use <u>all</u> resources more effectively and efficiently.

The more resources a debate program has, the more likely it is to succeed. However, the truth of that claim does not make it "unfair" for programs with resources to make them available to their students. That would make 15 passenger vans, scholarships, quality campus libraries, assistant coaches, computers, telephones, photocopiers, and even books "unfair" , too. Rather than direct these familiar frustrations at lexis/nexis or the schools that use it, directors should present on-line research capabilities in a positive light to their funding agents. If these items become a "must have" instead of "unfair," there will be a greater chance for equity. How? Because unless the governing debate organizations out-law their use completely, these and other new research acquisition methods will continue. The best hope for true equity is to join the "haves" through encouraging increased funding of academic debate.

The volume of available information is greater today than it was yesterday. As teachers of the critical thinking process we call intercollegiate debate, we need to help our students learn from the increasingly available data. Nothing suggests the information trend will soon reverse itself. Unless we are moving towards an "ignorance is bliss" stance, we need to use every opportunity to teach our students how to obtain, filter and select the better information from the rising tide of "stuff" that crosses our screens each day.

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[6] Yes, this would also add a cost increase, but it would be an optional cost. Along with CEDA annual dues, programs could be asked to indicate whether they would buy an access site at the national tournament, so the tournament staff could negotiate arrangements to secure the necessary technical support from a communications provider.

By acknowledging that many programs will use on-site access, and providing them an opportunity to do so, the CEDA national tournament would help relieve time pressures and increase the opportunity for additional sleep each night for students and critics, which would help that aspect of the tournament experience.

Students responding to my query who had competed at both the NDT and CNT (CEDA national tournament) universally mentioned the participation awards as enhancing their enjoyment of a national tournament. One commented about seeing their coach still using the key chain participation award from the 1986 NDT. I'm certain some people would abandon their award as soon as they received it, but I'm equally certain many more would keep them as a permanent rememberence.

Lack of access to food (except donuts and bagels) is a perennial problem at the CNT. The tournament should provide at least one additional meal the first two days of the tournament and provide food service to all critics and students competing on Monday. "Food service" means facilitating getting food for those people but not necessarily paying for it.

The other problem is accessing food once the tournament is over every evening. This problem can be diminished by notifying the involved parties well in advance. That is - locations likely to be effected by the needs of 500 people eating after nine or ten PM should be contacted several months in advance so they can offer specials and have adequate staff on hand to meet anticipated service demands; tournament participants should be alerted at registration (and this has happened irregularly at CNT since 1987) that restaurants "X" are ready to meet the special needs of the tournament participants.[7]

Some of the responsibility for checking out how to satisfy the details of enjoyably and successfully attending the CNT must fall on program directors. If doing well and enjoying the CNT is a programmatic goal, choices must be made that facilitate achieving the goal, and that may mean re-prioritization of a program's time and money.

Photocopying is always a need and frequently a problem. The 1996 CNT did the best job thus far of serving the participant needs for quick, reliable and convenient photo copying by having a high capacity set up at the tournament hotel. Guaranteeing on-campus access to similar services is the next step. Providing those resources to the tournament should become (if it has not already) part of the official bid requirements for selecting the CNT host institution.

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[7] I also would encourage us to steal the NDT practice of sending out a nationals information well in advance (See Exhibit 4) and include a tentative schedule so directors can begin the complete planning process.

JUDGING

This issue is probably the most complex and most divisive of any national tournament questions.

The questions about judging drew the most detailed participant complaints particularly among those who had exclusively attended the CNT. It is important to note that those who were at the NDT also had issues with judging quality, but not to the extent that individuals who were at CNT did.

A summary of student opinion about judging is that they want critics who have as much or more judging experience as the individuals who judge at the tournaments they normally attend, and that the national tournament **specifically** should use some form of participant judge selection.

Perceived judging quality has a huge impact on the credibility of the national tournament with the students. One respondent mentioned that in material provided by the NDT as part of the history of the organization, a straw poll of students put winning the NDT as the third choice when rating the most important tournament to win in the 1970s. Among CEDA participants, I suspect a current poll would not find students ranking the CNT as the tournament most likely to produce the "best team" in the country, and a lot of that has to do with the perceived poor quality of judging.

Granted, there are multiple views of what constitutes a "good" judge. If there weren't, the problem would be much easier to solve. Rather tan devote ten or twenty pages to my feelings about the matter, here are the specific positives and negatives reported by the students who responded to my inquiry.

Positives

- The philosophy book and other attempts to preview the expectations of individual critics;
- Multiple judge panels in all NDT preliminary rounds;
- Some form of mutual preference judge selection;
- Regional constraints;
- Criteria for those who are invited/allowed to judge which included a minimum number of rounds on the current topic.

Negatives

- Using the partial quadocta final as a substitute for judge screening;
- The wide variations among judging philosophies on many of the quad- through doubleocta final round panels at the CNT. The sentiment was that having three completely different types of critics was harder to adapt to than having two or more critics of ANY type excluding completely "lay" critics;

- Allowing individuals with little or no debate experience to judge while excluding undergraduates who had exhausted their eligibility to compete;
- Being judged by otherwise qualified people who were too tired, hung-over, or otherwise impaired (especially in the Monday elimination rounds).

Increasing the positives and diminishing the negatives of CNT judging should be one of the primary platforms of the student representatives to CEDA, if the response from the 18 individuals who contributed to this paper is an accurate reflection of the whole.

The current semi-merger of the NDT and CEDA circuits should not be used as an excuse to avoid dealing with this sensitive and very important issue. One organizational effort that CEDA could investigate is a program of critic instruction. As a body, CEDA does nothing to aid individuals from the inside or outside learn how to be responsible critics. "Sink or swim" isn't a successful teaching method in aquatics or debate. CEDA isn't the only responsible party in improving judging quality. Directors can and should train their students in good judging habits by judging with them at high school tournaments and summer institutes. Also, we can all aid critic development by setting positive examples.

First, by refraining from acts that would make a critic reluctant to explain why and how they made a decision. Stop making insensitive remarks about an individual's perceived judging deficiencies. Stop berating judges when you disagree with their decision; anger is unprofessional at best. Punish students who don't control themselves.

Second, by being more accurate and honest (even if what you think is "uncool") when we are telling students about our individual perspective as a critic. Additionally, we must be careful when we are in the role of a judge to make the best decision we can in congruence with the way we explained our philosophy of evaluation prior to the round. That consistency is very important.

Finally, we must take our role as a critic seriously and not risk making a bad in-round decision because we made a poor choice the night before and got too little sleep or had too much fun.

Awards and Ceremony

Currently competing NDT participants thought there was a bit too much ceremony at the NDT, but those who are now coaching thought the ceremony very important. Likewise, those who had been to the CNT and NDT thought the NDT had a more appropriate level of ceremony for a "national tournament."

Another universal sentiment was that the NDT awards are much nicer than the ones presented by CEDA.

Both of those issues and the obvious choice of the NDT welcoming and final report books over the CNT handouts comes down to another financial choice. The big positive to doing so is providing a continuing mechanism to record the history of our organization.[8] That history could be a real tool for directors when explaining the value of intercollegiate debate to everyone from high school students and the news media to upper administration.

With the 30th anniversary of CEDA and the 15th national tournament on the horizon, planning should begin now.

Social Opportunities

Debate is at the center of many student-debaters' lives. Whether you regard that as a positive or a negative, it is inescapably true and therefore makes socializing at the national tournament an important element of the "national experience." The difficulty lies in the tug-of-war between wanting to have fun and wanting to maximize winning.

The scheduling changes proposed herein would go along way toward providing a reasonable amount of time to be non-competitive while the tournament is in progress, but arrangements should be made for an end-of-tournament event so students can come together without annoying hotel security or other guests. However, in addition to the question of cost, issues of liability and questions of underage alcohol consumption and drug usage make hosting a party serious business.

CEDA should not take any steps to encourage or facilitate underage drinking and/or drug use, and that should be made clear in all communication concerning sponsored events. Some students will still probably do both anyway, but if CEDA arranged for a ballroom or to take over a bar or restaurant completely for a private party with alcohol only for those of age, many students might choose to attend to socialize one last time with large numbers of their friends from across the country.

The post-tournament celebration is another issue that should be part of the bid package the hosting institution completes. It should also be part of the official tournament schedule.

Conclusion

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[8] I learned a great deal about the NDT by reading the 50th Anniversary book Allan D. Louden so graciously sent me. It saddens me that we have nothing similar happening in CEDA, and many of its pioneers are no longer actively associated with the organization. "You don't know what you've lost 'til it's gone," is not the epitaph I wish for the Cross Examination Debate Association, but I fear that's what we risk if we don't make some institutional decisions that allow the history to be recorded.

Nothing about this paper is an attempt to say past CNTs have been horrible, that those associate with planning or running them have had anything but the best intentions, or that the NDT is a better national tournament. It is an honest attempt to improve an already fine product and steal a couple of good ideas from other organizations. It was also offered to give students a voice in improving the product that is intended to serve them.

Organizing and running a national tournament is a gigantic undertaking. Thanks to all who make it possible every year.

Finally, I believe what I've learned about changing the national tournament lends credence to hiring an unaffiliated professional administrator whose job is to work exclusively on preparations for the national tournament, an annual budget, grant writing and public relations.

EXHIBIT 3A

Thursday	
9-noon	Registration
2pm-3pm	Committee Meetings
3:30-5pm	CEDA Spring National Meeting
8pm-9pm	Event for tournament welcome and distribution of participation awards (could includereception)
Friday	
7:30am-8:30am	Continental Breakfast
8am	Pairings released
9am	Round I
11am	Pairings released
noon	Round II
2pm	Lunch (served on-site)
3pm	Pairings released
4pm	Round III
6pm	Pairings released
7pm	Round IV
Saturday	
7:30am-8:30am	Continental Breakfast
8am	Pairings released
9am	Round V
11am	Pairings released
noon	Round VI
2pm	Lunch (served on-site)
3pm	Pairings released
4pm	Round VII
Sunday	
7am-8am	Continental Breakfast
7:30am	Pairings released
8:30am	Round VIII
10:30am	Pairings released
11:15am	Round of 132
1pm	Lunch (served on-site)
2pm	Pairings released
3pm	Round of 64
5pm	Dinner
6pm	Round of 32
8:30pm	Awards Assembly
Monday	
8am	Pairings released
9am	Octafinals

EXHIBIT 3B

Thursday	
7pm-9pm	Registration
Friday	
9am-10:30am	National CEDA Meeting
11am	Pairings released
noon	Round I
2pm	Pairings released
3pm	Round II
5pm	Dinner (served on site)
6pm	Pairings released
7pm	Round III
Saturday	
7:30am-8:30am	Continental Breakfast
8am	Pairings released
9am	Round IV
11am	Pairings released
noon	Round V
2pm	Lunch (served on-site)
3pm	Pairings released
4pm	Round VI
Sunday	
7am-8am	Continental Breakfast
7:30am	Pairings released
8:30am	Round VII
10:30am	Pairings released
11:15am	Round VIII
1pm	Lunch (served on-site)
2pm	Pairings released
3pm	Round of 64
5pm	Dinner
6pm	Round of 32
8:30pm	Awards Assembly
Monday	
8am	Pairings released
9am	Octafinals